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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7906th meeting
Thursday, 23 March 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Johnson/Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Selim
	Ethiopia	Ms. Zemene
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Amendola
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Ali
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Ms. Wallström
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 16 December 2016 to 1 March 2017) (S/2017/224)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 16 December 2016 to 1 March 2017) (S/2017/224)

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, the Ministers and other representatives to the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of South Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Festus Mogae, Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission and Former President of Botswana; and Ms. Betty Sunday, Coordinator of the Women's Monthly Forum on Peace and Political Processes in South Sudan.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of participants to document S/2017/224, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan covering the period from 16 December 2016 to 1 March 2017.

Following consultations with the members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on their behalf:

"The Security Council expresses deep alarm at the situation in South Sudan, stresses again that there is no military solution to the conflict, and renews its condemnation of continued fighting across the country. The Security Council reiterates its call upon all parties to immediately adhere to the permanent ceasefire as called for in the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan ("the Agreement"), reminding all parties that implementation of a ceasefire is critical for the success of any genuine, inclusive political process.

"The Security Council is deeply alarmed that famine was declared in parts of South Sudan, that many more South Sudanese face severe food insecurity, and is deeply concerned about the actions of all parties to the conflict that are perpetuating the humanitarian crisis. In this regard, the Security Council condemns any undermining of the ceasefire and restrictions and attacks on humanitarian personnel and their facilities as well as on the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially to famine-affected locations, and calls for an immediate cessation of such actions and immediate and unhindered access to all those in need. The Security Council further calls for all parties to take appropriate measures to protect United Nations and foreign premises and personnel and other civilians in South Sudan. The Security Council commends countries in the region who continue to receive and host refugees.

"The Security Council condemns reported human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, as applicable, and expresses deep alarm at the numerous and ongoing reports of sexual and gender-based violence and recruitment and use of children in violation of international law in South Sudan. The Security Council underscores the pressing need for accountability for any violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. The Security Council calls for swift implementation of chapter V of the Agreement, and expects all relevant parties mentioned in the Agreement to take all necessary steps towards the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan. The Security Council also stresses that the Commission of Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, as stipulated in the Agreement, is a critical part of the peacebuilding process in South Sudan.

"The Security Council underscores its conviction that a political solution to the conflict is essential, underscores its support for regional and international efforts to find such a solution in order to advance the Agreement. The Security Council supports the Joint Press Statement by the African Union (AU), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the United Nations of 29 January 2017, which commends the work

performed by the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) Chairperson Festus Mogae, and encourages the AU High Representative for South Sudan Alpha Oumar Konaré to undertake active shuttle diplomacy towards ensuring the implementation of the Agreement and the inclusivity of the National Dialogue in close consultations with the JMEC Chairperson, IGAD, and the United Nations. The Security Council calls on all parties to fully cooperate with Presidents Konaré, Mogae, and the United Nations in their efforts to advance peace in South Sudan.

"The Security Council notes the announcement on 14 December 2016 by President Kiir of the launch of a National Dialogue process. The Security Council notes that an immediate ceasefire by all parties is vital for any National Dialogue to be credible and recalls statements by Presidents Mogae and Konaré, that an inclusive political process must also be authentic, autonomous, and impartially led by a credible facilitator accepted by the people of South Sudan, and which supports the Agreement. The Security Council agrees that an inclusive political process is necessary to improve and maintain the security in the country. The Security Council emphasizes that an inclusive political process would include representatives of all the main parties to the conflict, the full and effective participation of women as well as representatives for a wide range of stakeholders and constituencies.

"The Security Council expresses its deep concern at the failure of the parties to fully adhere to their commitments to implement the Agreement, and in this regard, the Security Council calls for the following steps to be taken:

"1. Immediate adherence to the permanent ceasefire by all forces of the parties to the conflict and all other armed groups.

"2. Urgently address the challenges faced by humanitarian personnel in the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout South Sudan and specifically to famine-affected areas, including through meetings of the Humanitarian High Level Oversight Committee and urgent implementation of its decisions.

"3. Unconditional support of all parties for the endeavours of the United Nations, AU, and IGAD towards ensuring the implementation of the Agreement and the inclusivity of the National Dialogue as outlined in their 29 January 2017 statement.

"4. Immediate removal of obstacles to UNMISS and the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) operations including obstacles to the deployment of the Regional Protection Force and attacks on UNMISS and CTSAMM personnel.

"5. Immediate cessation of obstructions to and attacks on all national and international humanitarian personnel and facilities endeavouring to provide life-saving assistance throughout South Sudan.

"The Security Council expresses its intention to review progress on the steps outlined above no later than 30 April 2017.

"The Security Council expresses concern that the Government of South Sudan has not upheld all of its commitments towards implementation of the 4 September 2016 Joint Communiqué and renews its invitation to Government to update the Security Council on the Communiqué's implementation.

"The Security Council stresses that actions which threaten the peace, security or stability of South Sudan may be subject to sanctions under resolutions 2206 (2015) and 2290 (2016).

"The Security Council reaffirms its unwavering support for the people of South Sudan."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2017/4.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: I thank you, Mr. President, for your presence here today for this important meeting on South Sudan.

Before we turn to today's agenda, I would like to once again express our sincere condolences to the people and the Government of the United Kingdom on the loss of life and injuries suffered in yesterday's terrorist attack in London. The United Nations stands with the people of the United Kingdom, as we do with all those who have suffered from the menace of

terrorism around the world. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families.

The conflict in South Sudan continues to generate profound suffering. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the opposition are conducting military operations in a number of areas, with devastating consequences for civilians, who face seemingly endless violence and are being forced to flee their homes. At present, the situation is especially alarming in the greater Upper Nile area, with military clashes along the banks of the River Nile in and around Malakal, in the famine-affected counties of Unity and in previously stable areas of northern Jonglei. In the past three months, the greater Equatoria region has also continued to see high levels of fighting and insecurity, with retaliatory operations by the SPLA and its allied militias against suspected rebel groups and communities that are perceived to support them.

Civilians continue to be subjected to horrendous attacks, including rape and the recruitment of children. More than 1.9 million people have been displaced internally, more than 220,000 of whom are seeking safety in protection sites of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Some 1.6 million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The humanitarian crisis continues to deepen, with 100,000 people enduring famine, 1 million on the verge of that fate and 5.5 million who may be severely food-insecure by the summer. At least 7.5 million people across South Sudan — almost two thirds of the population — need humanitarian assistance. Three years of conflict have eroded livelihoods and disrupted farming, including in the Equatorias, the country's breadbasket. Humanitarian compounds and supplies have been repeatedly looted. The Government continues to impede deliveries of lifesaving assistance, including through denial of access and bureaucratic impediments. Most recently, the Government decided to institute a massive hike in the price of work permits for aid workers.

Yet despite the alarm sounded by the United Nations and the international community over the crisis, the Government has yet to express any meaningful concern or take any tangible steps to address the plight of its people. On the contrary, what we hear most often are denials — a refusal by the leadership to even acknowledge the crisis or fulfil its responsibility to end it. The peace process remains at a standstill. While President Kiir's statements regarding his intention to hold a national dialogue are welcome, they are not convincing in the context of the ongoing hostilities, the absence of consultations with key stakeholders, the systematic curtailment of basic political freedoms, the restrictions on humanitarian access and the growing fragmentation on both sides of the conflict.

Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous returned just yesterday from a trip to South Sudan, where he visited the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and acknowledged the important work that our courageous staff are undertaking in the country. He was accompanied by the Under-Secretary-General-designate for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, who will take up his duties after 1 April. Mr. Ladsous met with President Kiir, the First Vice President and Cabinet Ministers, and emphasized the critical importance of an inclusive political process for ensuring the well-being of the country's people. Indeed, credible dialogue cannot take place at the point of a gun. When civil-society and opposition members cannot meet or speak freely, when a significant proportion of the population cannot participate in discussions and when numerous communities are displaced or facing starvation, dialogue efforts are unlikely to succeed. The same holds true for elections, which can take place only once stability has returned.

The United Nations is working with the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to reinvigorate the political process and to resolve long-standing intercommunal disputes in South Sudan and the subregion. We support both the Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, President Festus Mogae, and the African Union High Representative for South Sudan, President Alpha Konaré, in their respective roles. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the United Nations country team are supporting intercommunal dialogue and local peace conferences. We also continue to work for the deployment of a regional protection force, despite continuing obstacles imposed by the Government of South Sudan.

But no such force and no amount of diplomacy can substitute for a lack of political will among those who govern the country. There is a strong consensus that South Sudanese leaders need to do more to demonstrate their commitment to the well-being of the country's people, who are among the poorest in the world. If there is to be any hope that those leaders will change their current calculations, greater pressure is needed.

That means, first and foremost, that the region and the Security Council must speak with one voice.

Let us not underestimate the dangers of South Sudan's trajectory. Atrocity crimes have occurred with impunity, and the potential for serious deterioration remains very real. Credible mechanisms for accountability are a must. For every child who dies, for every woman or girl raped with impunity, for every young boy conscripted into fighting and fed only hatred, there is an angry mother, father, sister or brother plunged into sorrow, feeding the cycle of vengeance.

To pull the country back from the abyss and back from a widening famine, we must collectively focus our energies on three immediate objectives. The first is achieving an immediate cessation of hostilities. The second is restoring the peace process, which means ensuring the representation of and consultation with the opposition, civil society and all South Sudanese, regardless of ethnicity, in the transition and in the proposed national dialogue. The third is ensuring unrestricted humanitarian access, including freedom of movement for UNMISS and a future regional protection force.

In two days, the IGAD Heads of State will meet in Nairobi. I urge the members of the Security Council and the leaders of IGAD to unanimously declare their support for those three objectives and to press the South Sudanese parties to implement them. All of the optimism that accompanied the birth of South Sudan has been shattered by internal divisions, rivalries and the irresponsible behaviour of some of its leaders. As a result, a country that saw a brief glimmer of hope for a better future has plunged back into darkness. We have to do everything in our power to change that.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mogae.

Mr. Mogae: I would like to thank the President of the Security Council, the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Boris Johnson, for his kind invitation to brief the Council today. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his accurate and detailed description of the current situation in South Sudan. I do not intend to cover the same ground with what little time we have. Suffice it to say that in the eight months since the outbreak of violence in July, the security, economic and humanitarian situations in South Sudan have steadily deteriorated to unacceptable levels.

The Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism now reports deliberate, planned conflict between the main parties to the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Government, and the SPLA in Opposition, which is loyal to Mr. Riek Machar, as well as other emerging armed groups, engage in the destruction of lives and communities in total violation of the ceasefire. Across the board, there is a heightened sense of alarm about the fact that the situation is slipping out of control. It is time for the international community to condemn in the strongest possible terms the violence, the killings, the human rights abuses and the destruction of homes. We must now stand together to do something about it.

Whether by design or default, a war is being waged across South Sudan, and I wish to spell out the three defining questions that we all face right now. How do we stop the fighting? How do we stop innocent people from dying of starvation? And how do we ensure that the interest and consent of all South Sudanese communities are fully represented and considered? Peace, relief and inclusivity — those three issues are wholly interconnected. The humanitarian crisis, now officially a famine, is the direct result of insecurity and of the violence done by all parties to the ceasefire agreement. The insecurity and armed violence are a direct result of the perceived political exclusion from the peace process and of the reality of that exclusion. Only when all the peoples and communities of South Sudan see that their interests and consent are being addressed, therefore, can peace return to the country and the people return to normal life.

There can never be a military solution in South Sudan, nor can a military or political regime be imposed on any side by any other. To find a genuine and durable political solution, the South Sudanese leadership must be willing to listen, accommodate and compromise. In the interim, we must urgently look again at all possible practical measures that we can take to alleviate the desperate suffering that millions of people are facing every day. Women especially have suffered the greatest injustices and won the greatest battle of the conflict. All parties to the peace agreement are failing in their basic duty to protect the South Sudanese people.

The international community must acknowledge that since the events of July 2016, a split in the SPLA in Opposition has resulted in two clear opposition factions: one loyal to Mr. Riek Machar, which is still fighting and has been excluded from all agreements and institutions at the present time, and the other loyal to General Taban Deng Gai and which is cooperating with the Government. I have had important discussions with the President of South Sudan, primarily focused on the national dialogue initiative, and the need for it to be genuinely and sincerely inclusive, not simply a discussion with those who agree with the Government. I reiterate my view that the national dialogue must be authentic, autonomous and impartially led for it to be credible and deliver a reliable representation of all views and concerns. A national dialogue conducted in such a fashion would contribute to the peace process in the spirit of the agreement.

I remain firmly convinced that the peace agreement remains the only viable framework through which to recover the peace process, drive inclusive engagement and re-establish momentum. However hard it may be, I urge all parties, guarantors and partners to continue to support the peace agreement and the implementation of its provisions. With regard to the implementation of the agreement, I can report only modest progress. The National Constitution Amendment Committee started slowly, but is now on course to complete the review of the Constitution before the end of this month. The Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism is monitoring and investigating violations of the ceasefire, but is regularly denied freedom of movement by all armed groups. The Joint Military Ceasefire Commission, the Joint Integrated Police and the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board continue to develop their plans very slowly, but to the exclusion of the pro-Machar Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition.

I have called on the Transitional Government of National Unity to demonstrate commitment to the agreement institutions by providing the required resources and facilities and allowing accelerated delivery, and I encourage the regional and international partners to support them.

Beyond the establishment of the technical committee for the national consultative process on the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, there has been no further progress on establishing mechanisms and institutions under chapter V of the peace agreement. I have yet to hear from the African Union Commission on the establishment of the hybrid court for South Sudan. These are matters of great concern. Given the escalation of the conflict, progress towards chapter V mechanisms is needed now more than ever before, and I appeal to all parties to move with haste to enable their swift establishment.

Finally, my recommendation is that we, the international community, must demand peace and the total cessation of violence around the country with one voice. We must activate the immediate deployment of a regional protection force and support the implementation of chapter II transitional security arrangements. We must demand the full and credible inclusion of all parties and stakeholders in the peace process. We must constantly encourage the Government to conduct a genuinely inclusive and impartial dialogue. We must endeavour to achieve an immediate improvement of the conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and ensure a renewed effort to create the hybrid court for South Sudan and thereby establish the mechanism for the prosecution of those who perpetrate atrocities and human rights abuses.

In conclusion, therefore, and in the face of an ever-worsening situation, I believe that only a resolute and unified approach by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union, the United Nations and the international community as a whole can restore hope to the people of South Sudan.

The President: I thank Mr. Mogae for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Sunday.

Ms. Sunday: I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting us, representatives of the civil society of South Sudan, to brief the Security Council on the current situation in our country. It is important for those here to hear directly from civil society in South Sudan, including women's organizations, on the security threat that we are facing and our recommendations for durable peace.

Today, I represent the Women's Monthly Forum, which was founded in 2014. Women from all walks of life come together to push for inclusion in the peace processes and to coordinate our voices with that of the negotiator during the peace negotiations in Addis Ababa. Since then, we have continued to advocate for women's inclusion in the implementation and monitoring of the peace agreement. The security threats for South Sudanese women continue to be extremely dangerous.

We cannot move freely to fetch water or get food owing to the repeated incidents of rape and other human rights violations. That is happening throughout the country, including in the camps for the protection of civilians. Women also continue to face challenges in their efforts to be heard, even in Government institutions.

If the peace agreement were implemented, women could go about their life without fear. Their children could go to school, and they could collect food and tend their gardens. The peace agreement cannot be allowed to die. It is a very important document for the South Sudanese. We have fought hard for it, and now we want it to come to life. It contains provisions that will enable women to play a role in determining the peaceful future of the country. The political will for the implementation of the peace agreement needs to come from all sides within South Sudan, as well as from the international community, including the Security Council. South Sudan cannot do it alone. We, civil society, need solution-oriented meetings, because we have seen numerous meetings that end with the adoption of position papers that are not action-oriented. We urge the Council and the Government to cooperate in seeking a peaceful and lasting solution to the political crisis in our country.

We are here in the meeting today to urge the Council to decide on action on the following key issues. The first is the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. The peace agreement offers great opportunities for our political transformation, but the challenge is that the parties to the agreement face issues of political will and good faith, because they focus too much on power-sharing. Secondly, thanks to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Council is aware of the incidences of sexual and gender-based violence in South Sudan. We urge the Council and the Government to cooperate to actualize the joint communiqué signed by the President and the United Nations.

Thirdly, the current humanitarian situation, including the famine in some parts of the country that has been declared by the Government, is disturbing. We therefore urge the Council to provide humanitarian support to those in need with all possible speed, and we urge our Government to provide the necessary support for facilitating humanitarian access and protecting humanitarian workers and property. Fourthly, the announcement of a national dialogue by the President of the Republic of South Sudan is a public call for full participation by all citizens in the quest for a lasting political solution to our country's political challenges. We urge that the dialogue be inclusive and facilitated by a reliable ceasefire that can ensure a secure environment in which all citizens can participate safely.

Fifthly, as a member of the United Nations, South Sudan has an obligation to fulfil its duties and responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. We are aware that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is approaching the renewal of its mandate. We ask that the new UNMISS mandate enable it to provide capacity support to the Government of South Sudan for human rights protection and the rule of law, for compliance with resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) and for the professionalization of policing services. Sixthly, we are pleased that the United Nations, the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have committed to coordinating efforts to seek a political solution to the challenges our country faces. We urge the Council to partner with our Government with the aim of making a reality of the stipulations in the AU-United Nations-IGAD joint communiqué of 29 January.

We urge the Council to be proactive in engaging the Government of South Sudan so as to realieze the political expectations contained in the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, and we urge the conflicting partiesn to commit to abiding by the decisions of the Council.

The President: I thank Ms. Sunday for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom.

As we sit safely in the Council Chamber, villages in South Sudan are being raided, plundered and set ablaze. Thousands of men, women and children are being driven from their homes, separated from their families and forced to endure terror and hunger as they seek safety in squalid camps. The toll of suffering in South Sudan has grown inexorably. At the close of 2015, some 2 million people had been displaced. Today, that figure has risen to 3 million, almost half of whom are refugees in neighbouring countries, including up to 1 million in Uganda.

Last month alone, the brutal cycle of raiding, retaliation and counter-retaliation compelled another

80,000 people to flee and, most telling of all, famine has been declared in areas of former Unity State — the first famine in the world in six years. Any visitor to that region of South Sudan will know that its green and fertile plains are watered by the tributaries of the White Nile. Nature and geography therefore cannot explain why famine has struck. Only the avarice and folly of human beings are to blame. I am reminded of the words of the hymn by Bishop Heber: "Though every prospect pleases ... only man is vile". We should be in no doubt that famine could blight other areas if the fighting does not stop. Against that background, no member of the Security Council can escape the responsibility to renew our efforts to restore peace in South Sudan.

Today, and each day afterwards, we must demonstrate the unity of the Council over what needs to be done. The peace accord of 2015 must be revived in order to deliver a genuine political process that embraces all people of South Sudan and begin the task of reconciliation and healing. There are three key steps to achieving that. First, there can be no real dialogue as long as South Sudan is ravaged by fighting. All parties must respect an immediate cessation of hostilities. As President, Salva Kiir is responsible for taking the first step and others must follow.

Secondly, there must be impartial leadership of the effort to revive the political process. Lastly, any talks will bring long-term peace only if all South Sudanese are represented. That means including not only the opposing forces but also other armed groups, political parties, displaced people, refugees, young people and women. President Konaré, the High Representative of the African Union (AU) for South Sudan, Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Secretary-General António Guterres have resolved to drive the process forward together. I also welcome President Mogae, Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, responsible for enforcing the implementation of the peace agreement.

We in the Security Council must demonstrate our wholehearted support for their efforts, and those responsible for atrocities must be brought to account through the establishment of a hybrid court. Given the scale of the suffering, all of the opposing forces have a special responsibility to enable the delivery of aid wherever it is required, anywhere in the country. I am deeply concerned about the reports that the Government of South Sudan has denied its own citizens the help they so desperately need by blocking humanitarian deliveries, including in Unity State, where famine has struck. We should all make clear that denying food to the starving is simply unconscionable; nor can we accept a situation in which the Government or any armed group obstructs aid agencies in their efforts to deliver emergency supplies or United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in its efforts to protect civilians. We should also spell out with unity, clarity and conviction the progress that we expect from the Government. We must back that up by resolving that the Council will consider alternative measures, including an arms embargo and targeted sanctions on individuals, if that progress fails to materialize.

The United Kingdom remains convinced that an arms embargo would serve to protect ordinary South Sudanese from the worst excesses of military power, and on a future occasion we will ask the Council to reconsider that measure. Our strength of feeling arises partly from Britain's profound ties of history and friendship with the people of South Sudan. We were a guarantor of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, which paved the way for South Sudan to achieve independence. The United Kingdom was a witness to the peace accord of 2015 that sought, unavailingly, to end the current conflict. We are now the second biggest bilateral donor to South Sudan and we are strengthening UNMISS peacekeeping by deploying almost 400 British military engineers, medics and a field hospital.

The Council is aware that more than 200,000 civilians have taken shelter inside United Nations sites across South Sudan, unable to leave those barbed-wire confines lest they be murdered for no other reason than their ethnicity. Day after day, UNMISS tries to protect those civilians, and I know that British peacekeepers will help UNMISS fulfil that task. But South Sudan's people should not have to rely on outside protection. And if our efforts falter, the Council should be in no doubt that South Sudan's tragedy could become even worse. There is an urgent need for collective action, particularly by neighbouring countries, who are already hosting 1.4 million refugees. As Ms. Sunday has just told the Council, the innocent and the most vulnerable are enduring the greatest suffering in this war.

We are all here today because we have an obligation to act, and we cannot leave this meeting believing that our work is done. We should acknowledge that a terrible failure of political leadership lies behind the bloodshed. At every level we must therefore place pressure on the

leaders of South Sudan, both in Government and in opposition, to act in the best interests of their people. We — the Security Council, the United Nations, IGAD and the AU — must help the South Sudanese to come together and agree on a common vision for their country's future. And we should all stand ready to make that vision a reality.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

Mr. Selim (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of my Government, I would like to to express my condolences to the people and the Government of the United Kingdom for the heinous terrorist attack that has cost the lives of innocent people. The expanding area where such acts occur shows how terrorist organizations are trying to instil fear and despair in our societies. It behoves us all to take measures and resolutions aimed at frustrating such murderous plans.

I would like to warmly thank the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's important meeting, and to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General, the Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission for South Sudan and the representative of civil society for their informative briefings.

On 9 July 2011, the world witnessed the Republic of South Sudan's declaration of its independence in response to the will of its people. It was a crystallization of the aspirations of its people and their hopes for a better future. However, less than three years after the birth of that State, those hopes suffered a setback. The country found itself in a dilemma, beset by armed violence that arose from acute political divisions, exacerbated by a devastating economic crisis. Those divisions have led some parties to the conflict to become focused on and trapped by their ethnicities and thereby disregard the aspirations expressed by the people of South Sudan in July 2011.

For six years — the age of the nascent State of South Sudan — the causes of the conflict became more acute, while the international community failed to fully recognize the extent of the challenges that South Sudan was facing. It was as if the responsibility of the international community had ended with the declaration of independence, without anyone taking stock of the deep-rooted causes of conflict. The subsequent developments in South Sudan have shown that international support for countries that are in political transition is crucial, both pre- and post-independence. We fully recognize the dangerous repercussions of this crisis for peace and stability in East Africa, and its enormous human and economic toll. The crisis could spill into the neighbouring States that are shouldering the majority of the responsibility for humanitarian assistance if it is not contained in a just and comprehensive manner.

The most important question is how to deal with the current situation and avoid the earlier mistakes of the international community in dealing with South Sudan since its independence, which means working to put an end to the suffering caused by displacement, sexual violence and famine. In that regard, our vision is based on a comprehensive approach. It includes a number of principles and measures that should be taken together in order to deal with the crisis and its root causes:

First, all efforts should be based on the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, signed in August 2015, as a comprehensive reference point for all the efforts to achieve a political settlement. The agreement includes all the basic elements necessary to reach a political solution and a peaceful transition of power.

Secondly, the call for a comprehensive national dialogue issued by President Salva Kiir is an opportunity that must be taken advantage of, as it provides an alternative forum for all parties to renounce violence and deal with divisions in a political context. We should therefore seek to enable such a dialogue to succeed without marginalizing any political or ethnic group. The responsibility of the international community is to provide political support for that dialogue. In that regard, Egypt is ready to use its historic relations with the region and all of the regional parties to provide whatever assistance the people of South Sudan need, to help to facilitate a dialogue and to arrive at results that can set the country on the road to peace and stability.

Thirdly, all parties have an urgent moral, legal and human obligation to put an end to all forms of violence, abide by international law and its related relevant principles, assume their responsibilities towards civilians, and help facilitate the mandate of the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan, which requires that it be able to reach all affected areas immediately and without restrictions in order to implement the Council's mandate. Creating obstacles to humanitarian efforts will only lead to more suffering,

increase the human costs of the struggle and erode the regional and international efforts aimed at reaching a political settlement for the crisis and at ending the suffering of the civilians.

For its part, Egypt has intensified bilateral talks with the Government of South Sudan and has received President Salva Kiir in Cairo wth the goal of supporting all efforts to achieve a political solution. In the past few weeks, President Al Sisi has continued to make efforts to that end, including by visiting Uganda and Kenya and dealing with the active regional parties in order to strengthen the efforts to put an end to the conflict and support stability. We have seen that our brother countries appreciate the role that we have played in this conflict. At the same time, we emphasize the importance of the coordination between the regional and international efforts being undertaken by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union Peace and Security Council and the Security Council to revive the political process as an alternative to violence. We must understand that no political effort will succeed unless it includes a set of measures that deal with the root causes of the problem.

We must enhance the strength and capacity of State institutions and their organizational structure and reform them, as well as creating the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, in accordance with chapter V of the peace agreement. All efforts must focus on the most important purpose — strengthening the concept of citizenship and transcending the tribal affiliations that have been exploited both internally and externally, in order to increase stability and address those divisions. It is vital to avoid a collapse of the country's State institutions and to maintain and strengthen them in the future. In that regard, sanctions-based approaches are unwise. They have not been useful and could worsen the situation. Egypt has seen the possible consequences of the collapse of States in its region close-up. We know that such a vacuum can be filled only by anarchy and armed groups that are extremely difficult to control.

In conclusion, Egypt reiterates its commitment to deploying every possible effort to reach a comprehensive settlement through the current membership of the Security Council, as well as our membership of the United Nations as a whole and of the African Union Peace and Security Council, taking into consideration the excellent relations that link Egypt with all the parties to the conflict in South Sudan.

Ms. Wallström (Sweden): I would first like to thank this afternoon's briefers. We value Mr. Mogae's regional perspective, and I would also like to sincerely thank Ms. Betty Sunday for her testimony here today. It is important to bring those first-hand accounts to the Security Council's attention.

I was here less than six years ago and I distinctly remember the celebrations, the dancing and the jumping for joy when South Sudan gained its independence and joined the United Nations. Since then, the hopes and dreams of the people of South Sudan for achieving peace and prosperity have been shattered. The current conflict is predominantly a man-made disaster that could have been avoided. It has caused too much suffering, led to innumerable violations of human rights and triggered a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions. It must end.

I would like to highlight three aspects that I believe we should focus on as we work to end this horrific conflict. First of all, the fighting must stop and the civilian population must be protected. We know that the primary responsibility for that lies with the Government and the parties to the conflict. We, the international community, acting through the United Nations, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), must work closely together and assist in finding a political solution to the conflict. In that regard, I welcome the leadership of the Secretary-General, President Konaré and President Mogae. The joint consultative meeting between the African Union, IGAD and the United Nations on the margins of the AU Summit is an example of the kind of coordination that is necessary to put real pressure on the parties to the conflict. The crisis in South Sudan is also part of a complex set of challenges facing the Horn of Africa. I again want to underline the need for a holistic regional approach, as we have also heard from previous speakers.

Secondly, the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan of August 2015 must remain the cornerstone of our efforts. The increasing fragmentation of the parties to the conflict and the reports of growing tensions between various ethnic groups underscore the importance of complementing the continued implementation of the Agreement with an inclusive political process. The proposal for a national dialogue could offer a way forward. However, the legitimacy and effectiveness of such a dialogue can be assured only if it includes representatives of all

parties to the conflict and other stakeholders in South Sudanese society. Simply put, genuine inclusivity is of paramount importance. In particular, we must ensure that women — half of the population — have an equal say in the dialogue. For the past few years, Sweden, together with UN-Women, has worked with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus of South Sudan. We have sought to strengthen their ability to represent grass-roots women and generate new ideas to advance the peace process. The voices of the members of the Caucus deserve to be heard at the international level, including by the Council.

Thirdly, the immensely difficult situation for women and girls in South Sudan must be addressed. It should improve drastically and without further delay. The alarming number of cases and accounts of sexual and gender-based violence are absolutely harrowing and are a sad reminder of my duties during my time at the United Nations as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The perpetrators of such acts must be brought to justice and their victims must receive care and compensation. In that regard, the hybrid court for South Sudan envisaged in the peace agreement could be an important measure for fighting impunity. Furthermore, the unprecedented level of recruitment and use of children by the parties to the conflict is unacceptable and should be addressed without delay.

I want to pay tribute to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations country team for their invaluable efforts to protect civilians, including the steps they have taken to increase the safety of women and girls. It is unacceptable that UNMISS is being hindered from fulfilling its mandate, and that deployment of the regional protection force has been delayed.

We must work jointly and resolutely to ensure that the hopes and dreams of a whole generation are not lost. The urgency of ending the conflict in South Sudan cannot be overstated. It must remain at the top of the international agenda.

Mrs. Zemene (Ethiopia): We would once again like to thank the United Kingdom presidency for organizing today's meeting on the situation in South Sudan. We express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his briefing and for all the efforts that he has made since assuming office to address the security and humanitarian situation in South Sudan as one of his top priorities. We are also pleased to see President Mogae, and we are very grateful to him for his unwavering commitment and dedication to discharging his heavy and difficult responsibilities as Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission. We in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the region are very indebted to him. We would also like to thank Ms. Sunday for her detailed briefing.

Though not all the causes may be exactly the same as in Somalia, in South Sudan there is also a looming humanitarian catastrophe in which millions are at risk of food insecurity. The situation is exacerbated by the high levels of insecurity that have resulted from the continued fighting and intercommunal violence in the country, coupled with a drought and a deepening economic crisis. Famine has already been declared in some counties, and saving lives through urgent international humanitarian assistance has become a top priority. In that regard, unhindered humanitarian access is indeed critical if we are to come to the rescue of the millions of South Sudanese in need of urgent lifesaving assistance. We welcome President Salva Kiir's expressed commitment to restore freedom of movement to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and humanitarian actors.

South Sudan has suffered for far too long, and the situation can be alleviated only through a cessation of all hostilities and violence in the country. That is why we remain extremely concerned by the reports of continued fighting between Government and opposition forces in several parts of the country and of its devastating consequences for the civilian population. Without genuine and inclusive political dialogue, there can be no end to the violence and the situation is bound to get worse. No cause is so noble that it should hinder our unity in helping South Sudan to achieve national reconciliation, security and peace.

The Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan of 2015 remains an important framework for ending the conflict in South Sudan and bringing sustainable peace to the country. The lack of meaningful progress in its implementation has been a source of great concern, and Mr. Mogae's briefing today demonstrates only too clearly that there is reason for even greater concern. It emphasizes the importance of reinvigorating the peace process with the goal of ensuring full implementation of the peace agreement and restoring peace and security through greater inclusivity, forgiveness and reconciliation.

The national dialogue initiative announced by President Salva Kiir has the potential to facilitate that objective, and we in the IGAD region have reiterated our unanimous support for that initiative while calling on the Government to ensure that it is conducted in an all-inclusive manner. Of course, for that to happen the necessary conditions have to be established, which is why the parties to the conflict should cease all hostilities.

The continued and collective commitment of IGAD, the African Union and the United Nations to the search for lasting peace, security and stability in South Sudan, as encapsulated in the joint press statement of January 29, is imperative. In line with the understanding reached between the three organizations, former President Alpha Oumar Konaré has already started his shuttle diplomacy with a visit to South Sudan. He has also met for consultations with my Prime Minister in his capacity as Chair of IGAD. Although we will not be able to hear from him today about the outcome of the consultations and progress made thus far, we remain hopeful that his efforts, in close consultations with IGAD and the United Nations, will help to ensure the inclusivity of the national dialogue and the implementation of the peace agreement. We believe that it is important that the Security Council support those efforts and send a strong and unified message to all the parties in South Sudan to engage seriously and constructively. I would again like to reiterate our firm conviction that if there is unity in the Council, it will not be overly difficult or impossible to make headway in achieving peace in South Sudan — peace that is rooted in ownership for the country and that ensures the safety, security and dignity of the people of South Sudan in all their diversity.

The deployment of a regional protection force (RPF) continues to be very important, and we note that progress, even if slow, has been made in that regard. As the Secretary-General rightly stated in his report (S/2017/224), the cooperation of the South Sudanese Government, as well as the support of regional and international partners, continues to be extremely critical to facilitating deployment of the force. Now more than ever, perhaps, it is self-evident that a regional protection force is needed, as is the full cooperation of the Government in facilitating its deployment. IGAD's Council of Ministers reaffirmed their support for this at their meeting last week and called for the RPF's speedy deployment. As a troop-contributing country, Ethiopia would like to take this opportunity to once again reiterate our firm commitment to deploying our forces as part of the RPF, and preparations are well under way to deploy an advance company in the near future.

Finally, regardless of what we in the region and the rest of the international community can do to help, it is ultimately up to the South Sudanese people themselves to address the enormous difficulties that they are facing today, including the interconnected challenges of peace, relief and inclusivity to which President Mogae so eloquently referred, which have serious implications for the lasting survival of their new nation. We therefore hope that all South Sudanese parties will rise to the challenge and work to restore peace through genuine dialogue and reconciliation.

Mr. Amendola (Italy): I thank you, Sir, especially for convening this meeting and focusing on the need for action. I thank the Secretary-General for his update on the situation in South Sudan and reiterate Italy's appreciation of and support for his plan of action, as it marks a first step towards the way out of the current crisis. I also thank President Mogae and Ms. Sunday for their insightful remarks.

With regard to the need for action, as we have heard today, the security situation in South Sudan continues to deteriorate. The political landscape is increasingly fragmented along ethnic lines. The nation is being undone by widespread violations of human rights, impunity, gender-based violence and the recruitment of child soldiers, and the humanitarian crisis is reaching a tipping point. Famine has already been declared in some parts of the country. The staff of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, humanitarian personnel — including religious volunteers — and their facilities have been attacked, looted and impeded in their efforts to provide relief to the population. As you have said, Mr. President, time is running out. Clearly, the Security Council needs to pursue a strategy following up on what we agreed on today in presidential statement S/PRST/2017/4.

We are friends of South Sudan. In 2011, we all supported South Sudan's independence. We welcomed President Kiir's announcement of the national dialogue, but for a dialogue to be credible and effective, it requires two preconditions and a clear and common objective. First, there is the matter of the ceasefire. Along with the Secretary-General and other Council members, we believe that the only possible solution to the conflict is a political one. To achieve that, the parties have to

stop fighting. For that, South Sudan's regional partners are the actors with the greatest potential influence. The African Union Special Representative's shuttle diplomacy, the United Nations engagement in the country and the Security Council itself can also make a significant contribution. In the Council, we are working to maintain our focus on a first concrete step, which is key to moving the process forward. We therefore support President Konaré's request to the South Sudanese Government to announce a unilateral ceasefire.

Secondly, there is the issue of inclusivity. Our engagement is aimed at promoting a truly inclusive national dialogue, open to all national political stakeholders, as well as to representatives of civil society and religious leaders. A dialogue could be the tool needed to end the conflict and help respond to the profound impact of the current humanitarian crisis. We can step up our political engagement with the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in order to lay the foundation for achieving that goal. But we must first establish security guarantees. The current progress on deploying a regional protection force is still limited. We call on the South Sudanese parties to cooperate constructively with the United Nations so as to improve security standards in Juba, and to refrain from obstructing humanitarian access.

Thirdly, there is the issue of the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, which the parties to the conflict signed in 2015. Few of its elements have been implemented — the proposed hybrid court and the reconciliation process come to mind — and implementation of some of the others should be relaunched. The success of a national dialogue will depend on achieving those goals.

Italy continues to provide humanitarian support to the people affected by the famine and the tragic situation in South Sudan. We have just announced a new contribution in response to the Secretary-General's appeal, but the humanitarian crisis in the country is mostly man-made. It is time for action. Let us work seriously, cooperatively and jointly in the Council, as well as at the regional and international levels, to return peace to South Sudan.

Mr. Ali (Kazakhstan): I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Secretary-General Guterres, President Mogae, the Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, and civil-society representative Ms. Sunday for their briefings.

Kazakhstan fully commends and supports the Secretary-General's commitment to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in South Sudan, for which there is no military option. We should strengthen the capacities of the Transitional Government of National Unity to address the political, economic, and humanitarian challenges that it is facing, including the full implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. We stress the importance of the work of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) in monitoring and overseeing the implementation of the Agreement, as well as the tasks of the Government. In order to make JMEC's work more effective, all South Sudanese parties should implement their commitments in full and cooperate fully with the Chair of JMEC.

Kazakhstan supports an inclusive national dialogue aimed at tangible results, in which all leaders in the conflict can participate. We concur with the African Union (AU) High Representative to South Sudan, Mr. Konaré, that that dialogue must be led by independent personalities who enjoy wide public support. In that regard, we welcome President Salva Kiir's promise to ensure the safety and freedom of all of the participants. We must seek all possible ways to support the AU High Representative's shuttle diplomacy in promoting dialogue and ensuring the implementation of the Agreement.

The chances of achieving the goal of ending the conflict by political means and mediation will be further enhanced by closer collaboration between the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the United Nations and other stakeholders. We therefore encourage the international community to support the Transitional Government in furthering that important political process. We agree that IGAD should play a leading role in resolving the conflict in South Sudan, because it has always been at the forefront in addressing problems in the region. We look forward to the forthcoming joint consultative meeting between the African Union Peace and Security Council and the Security Council at which issues relating to South Sudan will be considered.

The human suffering caused by the serious famine in some regions of South Sudan demands the international community's urgent attention. The effects

of the famine can be significantly alleviated if the South Sudanese Government cooperates positively with the United Nations and humanitarian actors by facilitating access to conflict-affected areas and by providing free movement to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

We are also concerned about the recruitment and use of children, in violation of international law, and about sexual and gender-based violence, both of which have reached alarming proportions. Closer coordination between UNMISS and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict is essential if we are to address those issues and end impunity.

The recommendations of the AU Commission of Inquiry to put transitional justice mechanisms in place, including a hybrid court, should be speedily implemented with the technical assistance of the United Nations Secretariat.

The mandate of UNMISS has been impeded for several months now, owing to the imposition of new immigration conditions affecting UNMISS personnel, and that procedure must be addressed. Likewise, the speedy deployment of a regional protection force is essential to reinforcing the overall security in the country. A full operational UNMISS and regional protection force would contribute significantly to improving the security situation. Kazakhstan is ready to join the multilateral action to propel South Sudan on its path towards peace and security, which are the prerequisites for regional stability.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank President Mogae and Ms. Sunday for their briefings.

We are outraged by the events unfolding in South Sudan, especially the widespread violence, ongoing atrocities and obstruction of humanitarian access. Rather than committing to the ceasefire called for in the 2015 peace agreement endorsed by the Security Council, South Sudan's leaders, both in Government and in opposition movements, have chosen to undertake new military offensives and orchestrate militia attacks, placing their own interests above those of their people.

Last December, some colleagues in the Security Council argued that pressure would be counterproductive because it would block a renewed political process, but there has been no progress since December. Instead, the situation has deteriorated and is even more grave now. There is ongoing and active fighting. In the past three weeks alone, 40,000 South Sudanese have been displaced to Uganda, with almost 500,000 displaced since last July. There are almost 5 million people facing severe hunger, and famine has been declared in two counties, with the very real prospect that it will spread. The famine is not a result of drought; it is the result of leaders who are more interested in political power and personal gain than in stopping violence and allowing humanitarian access.

The Government's continued unconscionable impediments to humanitarians seeking access to assist famine-stricken populations may amount to deliberate starvation tactics. There are reports of civilians being deliberately targeted on an ethnic basis, rampant sexual violence, widespread unlawful recruitment of child soldiers, the destruction of homes and the looting of property. It is not the first time in this now three-year-old conflict that Government forces have employed a scorched-earth campaign. Since September 2016 alone, almost 17,000 structures have been destroyed in just part of the former state of Central Equatoria.

Our goals are clear. The parties must cease hostilities, engage in meaningful and inclusive dialogue and deliver on their repeated promises to allow unfettered access for humanitarian organizations. Any political process must be truly inclusive of all South Sudanese voices in order to be sustainable and credible. Dialogue must complement the peace agreement, the core elements of which include a permanent ceasefire, power-sharing and critical reforms — a road map to lasting peace. We welcome the continued commitment of the United Nations and regional organizations to peace and stability in South Sudan, and we look to the shuttle diplomacy of the African Union High Representative to South Sudan, President Konaré, and to full engagement on the part of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to yield results in the next month. It is against that backdrop that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the peacekeeping mission authorized by the Council, is being prevented by both Government and opposition forces from fully carrying out its mandate. Moreover, the Council-authorized regional protection force has encountered unacceptable delays in deploying. The Council should take seriously this deliberate repudiation of its Chapter VII mandate.

The international community must make use of all of the tools at its disposal to address the crisis in

South Sudan and the many obstructions to the work of UNMISS. We have received warning after warning about the prospect for further mass atrocities, but we do not need such warnings to know that the sustained level of violence and ongoing atrocities in South Sudan are beyond unacceptable. As has been noted, an arms embargo is one tool that the Council could use to address the ongoing violence in South Sudan. Similarly, our unanimously adopted sanctions resolution 2206 (2015) gives us the ability to designate individuals whose actions or policies threaten peace in South Sudan, including those who obstruct the activities of international peacekeeping or humanitarian missions, those whose actions or policies expand the conflict and those who engage in the targeting of civilians, including women and girls.

Finally, I would like to say a word about accountability. Progress in establishinga hybrid court for South Sudan is desperately needed, and we urge the African Union and South Sudan to expedite progress on that important mechanism in the coming months. Peace and justice can and should be pursued simultaneously.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by welcoming the presence of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom at today's meeting, as well as the initiative taken by the British presidency to organize this meeting on South Sudan. I would also like to thank the speakers for their briefings. In particular, I commend the Secretary-General for the strength of his personal commitment to South Sudan. France fully subscribes to the priorities he has just outlined and fully supports him in his efforts to promote a return to peace and stability in that deeply scarred country.

After three years of conflict, the situation in South Sudan remains a serious source of concern. Famine is now added to the violence, atrocities and human rights violations that have been endured by the people of South Sudan for far too long, and to a large extent it is a result of those other problems. We cannot and should not remain inactive in the face of this situation. We should pursue three objectives.

First, priority should be given to a cessation of hostilities and access to vulnerable populations. The responsibility rests with all of the parties to the conflict and, first and foremost, with the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition. They must finally respect the multiple ceasefire agreements that they have reached and that they violate constantly. The emergence of militias and the expansion of the combat zones make that first step all the more essential.

The cessation of hostilities must be accompanied by an immediate end to the obstructions that have been inflicted on the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and humanitarian actors. The attacks, violence, harassment and looting to which the Blue Helmets and humanitarian actors fall victim are contrary to international humanitarian law. We salute the courage and dedication of those men and women in their tireless efforts to help the most vulnerable. The Council must be ready to impose sanctions on all who engage in such attacks against them. We also strongly regret that the protection and assistance efforts of both UNMISS and humanitarian personnel have been subject to access restrictions and bureaucratic barriers. The Government of South Sudan must make every effort to put an end to such obstructions and to facilitate these people's work. Only progress on those two fronts — an end to violence and the facilitation of humanitarian access — will make it possible to establish an environment conducive to peaceful political dialogue.

My second point is about the implementation of a political settlement, which is the only possible long-term solution to the country's challenges. In that respect, we know the terms of the political solution, for they are contained in the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan of August 2015. That document provides a comprehensive and detailed road map that must be implemented in order to restore security and stability in the country. In that regard, we welcome the work of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) under the leadership of President Mogae. It is essential to continue to monitor the peace agreement and to firmly remind the Transitional Government of National Unity — itself the result of the Agreement — and all other South Sudanese stakeholders of their responsibilities. Again, it is unacceptable that those who have committed to implementing those measures do not respect their word.

In that context, following the example of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union, the Council must recall its expectations regarding the implementation of the measures provided for in the peace agreement, including and perhaps primarily in the field of security. We therefore welcome the continued engagement of

IGAD and the African Union, in full coordination with the United Nations. The mission entrusted to President Alpha Konaré to advance the implementation of the peace agreement and to promote the inclusiveness of the national dialogue is essential in that regard. We call on all parties to work with him to that end. Any national dialogue would be in vain, even counterproductive, if it detracted from the implementation of the peace agreement and was not fully inclusive and conducted so as to assure its autonomy, its impartiality and the trust of all participants. In that regard, I would like to recall that France is of the view that instituting an arms embargo would improve the prospects for a political solution. By restricting access to weapons used to commit abuses against civilians, an embargo would help to lower the level of violence and foster an environment conducive to peaceful political dialogue.

Thirdly and lastly, we must remember that the cycle of violence and suffering can be broken only if real progress is made in the areas of justice and accountability. As Ms. Sunday said, women have suffered disproportionately in this conflict. The use of rape as a weapon of war, which has been abundantly documented by the United Nations, the African Union and civil-society organizations, may constitute a war crime or even a crime against humanity. Violence against children and the recruitment of child soldiers are equally revolting violations.

Faced with the current inadequacies in the efforts to combat impunity in South Sudan, we must remind the perpetrators of those crimes that they will be held to account. We can help to prevent such crimes by considering the punishment of those who commit or order them. We should also support judicial accountability efforts. Again, the peace agreement provides for mechanisms to that end, including the establishment of a hybrid court. We call for progress in that direction and reiterate our encouragement for the work of the African Union along those lines. If there is no improvement in this area, violence and human rights violations will only be repeated in South Sudan again and again.

Let us be realistic. The tragedy in South Sudan may yet worsen. But if the parties assume their responsibilities and the Council remains fully mobilized, that does not have to be a foregone conclusion.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would once again like to thank the British presidency for convening this important meeting. And, of course, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in South Sudan (S/2017/224). We are encouraged by his approach and his leadership. I would also like to thank President Mogae for being here and for his work on this difficult problem. And I thank Ms. Sunday for her presence.

Bolivia is of the view that, in line with the efforts of the Secretary-General, it is essential that the Council be united in supporting the political process, which is the only possible solution to the situation in South Sudan. We support the point made today by the Secretary-General on the three elements that are essential to making progress in resolving this tragic conflict: first, a cessation of hostilities; secondly, a resumption of the peace process; and thirdly, unrestricted humanitarian access. Similarly, the combined support and continuing follow-up that regional organizations, the United Nations and the international community can provide will be key to ensuring that the dialogue process is genuinely inclusive and enjoys legitimacy.

In addition, I would like to express the support of my delegation for the joint press statement of 29 January 2017 by the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the United Nations in support of a national dialogue. In that regard, I would also like to stress our recognition of the work and good offices of the Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, Mr. Mogae, and the African Union High Representative for South Sudan, Mr. Alpha Konaré.

With regard to the security situation, we call for compliance with the peace agreement on the cessation of hostilities between the parties and the end of the clashes in the regions of Equatoria, the Upper Nile, Bahr el-Ghazal, Malakal and Wau Shilluk, which have led to a general situation of insecurity and the ongoing displacement of civilians, of whom women and children are the most vulnerable. We believe that it is important to ensure that the Government, together with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), works to guarantee unrestricted access for humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians in the areas that need them the most.

We are concerned about the reports of human rights violations, sexual violence and the recruitment and use of children. We call for chapter V of the peace

agreement to be upheld, and we hope that the African Union will take all necessary measures to establish a just, impartial and credible hybrid court for South Sudan. It is also important to welcome the progress made in the practical measures being taken to deploy a regional protection force, which could contribute significantly to mitigating the worsening security situation as long as we are clear about what its functions will be. The regime's cooperation is also very important in that regard.

Concerning the humanitarian situation, the announcement by the Food and Agriculture Organization of localized famine in Leer and Mayendit counties represents an urgent call to the Government and the international community to take immediate measures to mitigate it and ensure that the situation does not deteriorate further. According to figures issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 100,000 South Sudanese are in a state of famine and 5.5 million are experiencing food insecurity and in need of concerted action. According to Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien and his appeal to the international community and financial donors, it is essential that we raise $1.25 billion to deal with this difficult problem.

The famine is clearly caused by a number of factors, including the armed conflict between the various parties, the difficulties of humanitarian access and the severe drought in the region, which also shows that the effects of climate change increase the potential for conflict. That is why we call on the Government to work together with humanitarian workers and UNMISS staff to bring the necessary assistance to the people in those regions as soon as possible.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the joint work of regional organizations is fundamental to efforts to develop action plans aimed at strengthening the institutions of South Sudan. Those plans must address the institutions' structural problems and should respect the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness whereby all development cooperation should be adapted to the country receiving it, aligned with the country's plans, coordinated among the parties and, lastly, based on the mutual responsibility of all stakeholders. Similarly, we believe that the conflict in South Sudan should be resolved by the people of South Sudan themselves, with the help of the international community, while respecting the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Ilichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Mogae and Ms. Sunday for their assessments of the situation in South Sudan. We also welcome the personal efforts of the Secretary-General to reach a settlement on South Sudan.

We agree on the importance of coordinating actions by the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the United Nations aimed at ensuring peace, stability and security in South Sudan. We support the Secretary-General's approach in seeking African solutions to African problems with the appropriate support of the United Nations, including where the problem of South Sudan is concerned. We believe that it is appropriate that IGAD should play a central role in that process. We credit the Secretariat for its recent provision of more balanced assessments in its monthly reports, among which we would like to emphasize the progress that has been made in preparing for the deployment of a regional protection force. As the information makes clear, the time frame for the deployment of front-line units was postponed somewhat through no fault of the South Sudanese. Juba's constructive position on the issue of the regional protection force is evidenced by the fact that the Government has allocated the first plot of land for their barracks, while as far as we know, the delays on the second plot are due to some unavoidable formalities.

We urge the Secretariat to continue to cooperate with Juba in order to resolve all the current problems involving the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), including the need to create a mechanism for the prompt resolution of visa problems and for determining the modalities for deploying the regional protection force while complying with the basic norms of peacekeeping.

We share the concerns about the country's disastrous humanitarian situation, and we note the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to improve things. We welcome President Kiir's statement on granting humanitarian access to the regions where there is a food crisis. We should not omit to note the assistance that has been given to the people of South Sudan by Khartoum. At the same time, considering the situation in neighbouring Somalia and Kenya, we should also point out that the famine in various parts of South Sudan is the result not only of security problems but also of bad weather.

We are also alarmed by the news of armed clashes in various parts of the country. We continue to hold the view that to a large degree those incidents are the result of command-and-control problems, as well as a certain lack of discipline among Government troops and those of the opposition. Another factor is the rift in anti-Government forces between supporters of Taban Deng Gai and Machar, with clashes that occur for inter-ethnic or simply criminal reasons.

We welcome President Kiir's announcement of the forthcoming holding of a national dialogue in the framework of the peace agreement and call for active support to it. We trust that the proposed amnesty will enable progress to be made in the political process and also help to resolve the problem of the presence of supporters of the former First Vice-President Riek Machar on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In general, we believe that the parameters of a national dialogue and the location of the consultations should be determined by the South Sudanese themselves. We agree that it will be impossible to promote national dialogue or implement the peace agreement if the ceasefire is not maintained. But it would be unfair to blame the continuing violence exclusively on the Transitional Government of National Unity.

We consider it absolutely inappropriate to bring up threats of genocide. The rise in inter-ethnic tensions is largely the result of provocative statements and actions by armed and criminal groups and undisciplined elements of the security forces. That hardly corresponds to the suggestions of some kind of purposeful, systematic policy on the part of the authorities.

We welcome the establishment within UNMISS of a working group on hate speech and incitement. We would like to emphasize the importance of preventing similar activities emanating from any country through Internet social networks, since otherwise the entire content of resolution 2327 (2016) would simply be ineffective.

Our position on the new Security Council sanctions against South Sudan is well known. If we are to establish lasting peace in South Sudan, what we need is not a Security Council arms embargo, but rather targeted measures to disarm the population and to demobilize and reintegrate combatants. We also believe that it is essential to heed the views of the regional Powers on the fact that this is not the time for proposals for introducing additional restrictions on Juba. Against that backdrop, we would point to information from United Nations experts that the same countries that appear to advocate introducing an arms embargo in the Security Council may be supplying South Sudan with weapons.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the Secretary-General and the other briefers for their comprehensive presentations. I also commend the United Kingdom for providing a timely opportunity to discuss the further international efforts required to resolve the conflict in the world's youngest nation.

Basically, and tragically, almost all the worst fears about the fate of the country have become a reality. South Sudan is on the verge of chaos. Millions have been displaced from their homes. The economy is in ruins. Hunger and poverty are rampant. As the South Sudanese people suffer, the warring parties continue to pursue their goals by military means. Killings, abductions, rape, looting and the burning of homes now constitute a horrifying daily routine in South Sudan. Yet in recent months the situation has sunk to unprecedented new lows, with reports of growing ethnic violence and declarations of famine in some parts of the country. Leer county in Unity state is just one example. It is one of the epicentres of the famine, where more than 100,000 people face imminent starvation. Villages are deserted. Gunmen from both sides have torched crops and chased farmers from their fields. People are hiding in swamps. They eat water-lily roots and the occasional fish that they manage to catch. There are no schools and no health services. There is nothing but the fear of losing the only thing that still belongs to them — their lives. It is shameful that all of this is happening in the twenty-first century. It is a disgrace that we, the international community, have not managed to prevent it from happening. It is an outrage that the South Sudanese political leaders have failed to shoulder their responsibilities for their own people. Time is not on our side. But as long as we do not stand by idly, that human tragedy can still be averted.

How can we do that? We must shake up the deadly status quo and divert the energies currently squandered on war towards advancing peace. Public statements of condemnation and threats of consequences without action will not help. Both sides largely discount them as barking with no bite. Biting requires a get-tough approach that might truly be able alter the calculations and influence behaviour. If we are to stop the fighting, the flow of arms must be stopped. If we are to prevent public funds from being used for personal purposes, they must be made inaccessible to certain individuals.

If we are to stop attacks on civilians, the perpetrators must be held accountable.

That is why Ukraine believes that an arms embargo and additional targeted sanctions are still relevant if we are to prevent South Sudan from sliding into war and chaos. We do not believe that such measures will be a panacea. However, we do believe that they will reduce the parties' ability to continue fuelling the conflict. That will help to silence the military equipment they already have and stop desperately needed financial resources being spent on new weaponry.

Ukraine firmly believes that the conflict in South Sudan has no military solution. An inclusive political dialogue within the framework of the 2015 peace agreement is the only way to restore peace and stability in the country. In that regard, we welcome the initiative of the Government of South Sudan to launch a national dialogue aimed at promoting national reconciliation and inter-communal harmony among all groups in South Sudan. However, for it to be credible and effective, the hostilities must cease immediately, the rule of law must be restored and humanitarian aid must be allowed to reach those in need.

Finally, I would like to express Ukraine's full support to the Secretary-General's commitment to working closely with the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development member States and other partners to ensure inclusivity in the implementation of the peace agreement and the national dialogue process. As one of the troop and police contributors to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Ukraine will continue to actively back United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts in that fragile country.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, the Senegalese delegation would like to thank the United Kingdom presidency for its initiative in convening this important briefing on South Sudan, over which Mr. Boris Johnson, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, was kind enough to preside. We also thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission for their important briefings, and we appreciate Ms. Betty Sunday's important presentation on the situation. Their statements have further highlighted the acuteness of the issue before the Council.

The crisis that has torn South Sudan apart for more than three years has led to an increase in violence and violations of human rights. My delegation would like not only to reiterate its profound concern about the worsening security situation in the country and its impact on the implementation of the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, but also to condemn the armed incursions and threats against humanitarian workers and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), as well as the violations of the status-of-forces agreement, international humanitarian law and the security of the United Nations staff.

The repeated violations of the ceasefire agreement and the increasing hostilities in many parts of the country have, as we are all aware, led to a wave of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries and an increase in the number of internally displaced persons within the country, further worsening an already disastrous humanitarian situation. If we add to that the famine that is now present in various regions, it becomes a matter of urgency for us to act if we are to prevent the population from succumbing to disease and hunger. The fact is that the ongoing fighting and the economic collapse have left more than 100,000 people facing a situation of famine. According to various United Nations agencies, 1 million more are considered to be on the borderline of famine. It is the worst famine the country has seen since the conflict began.

My delegation therefore believes, and I think we can all agree, that only a political solution to the conflict in South Sudan will make it possible to resolve the disastrous humanitarian situation once and for all. We therefore call on the various parties to the conflict to resume dialogue and implement the peace agreement in the Republic of South Sudan. In that regard, we believe that the national dialogue process announced in December by President Salva Kiir could, if it proves to be truly inclusive, free and transparent, help to create conditions conductive to the restoration of peace in the country. That would endow the process with the necessary legitimacy and ensure ownership on the part of the South Sudanese population, without discrimination, with the support of the region and the international community. The national dialogue should also make it possible for those involved to discuss general issues, including issues crucial to governance, security-sector reform and national reconciliation, among others. It is in that spirit that we warmly encourage cooperation among the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the United Nations

aimed at ensuring coordinated measures to support the peace process, including the national dialogue process, and at ensuring the broadest possible inclusivity in the national dialogue through the involvement of all the parties to the conflict in South Sudan.

Going back to the famine, President Alpha Konaré, the High Representative of the African Union for South Sudan, has made specific proposals aimed at mitigating the disastrous effects of the famine so as to ensure overall food security in the rest of South Sudan. That will require a cessation of hostilities, particularly in order to enable farming activity to resume. We therefore call on all of the armed groups to immediately cease hostilities and allow UNMISS — and we pay tribute here to the staff's untiring efforts in a hostile environment — to give humanitarian personnel access to the civilians who need their help. Unless unhindered access is provided immediately, the humanitarian situation can only get worse, and it will be the local population that will suffer most.

My country also supports the creation in South Sudan of a hybrid independent court for prosecuting the perpetrators of crimes and other atrocities against the civilian population, and we call on the Government of South Sudan to support the African Union in that endeavour.

Finally, with regard to the regional protection force — and we welcome the recent developments noted concerning its deployment — we urge the South Sudanese authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure its immediate deployment. Here I would like to pay tribute to the troop-contributing countries for their dedication to the cause of peace in South Sudan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this timely briefing. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General, to Mr. Mogae, the Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission for South Sudan, and to Ms. Sunday for their very informative briefings.

Japan remains deeply concerned about the ongoing hostilities and the dire humanitarian situation in South Sudan, which has been exacerbated by famine. Many lives are at stake. The members of the Security Council and international partners must continue to extend lifesaving support to the innocent people of South Sudan. In addition to the $22.4 million in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance announced in January, Japan decided last week to contribute an additional $6 million in response to the Secretary-General's call for international support to address the famine.

For international assistance to be effective it must reach those in need. To that end, safe and unhindered access is essential. We are troubled by the many reports of restrictions on humanitarian access, including on work permits, that only increase the suffering of innocent people. Worse still, aid providers continue to be targeted in such incidents as the tragic killing by unknown gunmen on 14 March of personnel from the International Organization for Migration. Japan calls on President Kiir to honour his previous commitments and take immediate action on the ground, including through improved humanitarian access at the local level and by working to bring about a cessation of hostilities. The primary responsibility to protect civilians rests with the Government of South Sudan. We urge that concrete progress on that front be made.

There is no alternative to a political process aimed at achieving genuine peace. Japan reiterates its full support for the collective commitment and close coordination on South Sudan demonstrated by the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the United Nations in their joint statement in January. Japan welcomes the Secretary-General's ongoing engagement at this critical time. We also appreciate the strong involvement of both President Konaré and President Mogae, and we support their call for South Sudan to make the national dialogue as inclusive, free and transparent as possible. The Council should continue to be united in supporting those engagements and efforts. As part of the efforts to promote inclusivity and reconciliation, Japan is considering providing support to grass-roots peace initiatives through the United Nations Development Programme. The successful holding of a national day of prayer on 10 March with broad participation was a step in the right direction. The onus is now on President Kiir and the Government. We strongly urge President Kiir to build on that spirit in pursuit of a genuine and inclusive national dialogue process. Other parties should also renounce violence and cooperate in that national endeavour.

Japan takes note of some signs of progress on the deployment of a regional protection force, including regional countries' reaffirmation of their commitment to participating in the force, and by the visits by troop-contributing countries' reconnaissance teams and enablers to South Sudan. But there are still challenges

to be resolved regarding the force's full deployment. We need further progress on land provision and airport coordination in order to ensure that it can function effectively. We again call on the Government to fully cooperate with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, including with regard to the regional protection force.

Notwithstanding our recent decision to end the activities of the Self-Defence Force engineering unit, Japan remains unwavering in its commitment to peace and stability in South Sudan. Japan will support efforts towards an inclusive national dialogue and work with the parties concerned for the smooth and effective operation of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, including the early deployment of a regional protection force. Japan will also continue to provide development cooperation and humanitarian assistance to those in need, thereby contributing to nation-building in South Sudan.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to join other speakers in thanking the presidency of the United Kingdom for this initiative. We were also grateful for the presence among us of the British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson. We thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Sunday and Mr. Mogae for their statements.

Today's presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/4) and the Secretary-General's statement have covered all of the points in the text that we prepared for my statement this afternoon, so I will be very brief.

I will just say that the presidential statement establishes and clearly outlines five measures that are needed if progress is to be made on the situation in South Sudan. We believe, therefore, that we should urge the Council to remain vigilant in seeing those steps implemented in close cooperation with all of the regional organizations involved in issues related to South Sudan.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks the United Kingdom for convening today's meeting and Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing. We listened attentively to the statements made by Chairman Mogae and Ms. Sunday.

Recent events show that the situation in South Sudan continues to be complicated. President Kiir has put forward an initiative on holding a national dialogue and promoting economic development. Meanwhile, the Government of South Sudan is facing numerous difficulties in implementing the peace agreement, maintaining national stability and addressing the humanitarian crisis and the famine.

China hopes that the international community will provide assistance in the following four areas: first, it should forcefully push for a political settlement of the question of South Sudan, since that is the only possible solution. The international community should continue to put pressure on all the parties in South Sudan to cease hostilities, return to the political settlement track and effectively implement the peace agreement. China welcomes President Kiir's initiative on holding a national dialogue and hopes that all of the parties in South Sudan will actively participate in that process, settle their differences through dialogue and consultations and promote reconciliation in a joint effo: i to achieve national peace, stability and development.

Secondly, the role of regional and subregional organizations should be brought into full play. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) have done extensive mediation work on that issue. The United Nations should give full play to the comparative advantages and respective roles of IGAD and the AU, step up efforts to implement the joint statement signed by the three parties IN January during the AU Summit and lend greater support to mediation efforts led by Chairman Mogae of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission and AU High Representative President Konaré, so as to create synergy in seeking a resolution to the situation in South Sudan.

Thirdly, we must enhance the capacity of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to fulfil its mandate. China is in favour of UNMISS playing a constructive role in assisting all of the parties in South Sudan to implement the peace agreement, protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access. We hope that the Government of South Sudan will actively implement the joint communiqué issued with the Security Council, as well as the relevant Council resolutions; and we support UNMISS in fulfilling its mandate by cooperating with the deployment of the regional protection force and increasing consultations with the United Nations and IGAD, thereby properly addressing any issues that might arise in the cooperation process.

Fourthly, South Sudan must be actively helped to combat the famine. We hope that the international community will provide active support to the disaster relief efforts of the South Sudanese Government, encourage all of the parties in South Sudan to act in the overall interest of the people and create favourable conditions for the speedy delivery of disaster relief to affected areas. The international community should help the Government increase investment in agriculture and infrastructure and enhance the Government's capacity for self-reliance and disaster resilience so as to promote sustainable economic and social development.

The Chinese Government has actively participated in and promoted the peace process in South Sudan by pushing for peace talks and dispatching peacekeepers. China has made its contribution to the peace process in South Sudan. Recently, the Special Representative of the Chinese Government on African Affairs visited Uganda, Kenya and South Africa, and exchanged views with the countries in the region on the situation in South Sudan. China will continue to play a constructive role in restoring peace, stability and development in South Sudan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Sudan.

Mr. Malok (South Sudan): At the outset, permit me to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, and your delegation on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. My delegation pledges its full support. I would like to assure the Council of my cooperation and support in tackling issues of concern to my country.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and former President Mogae, Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), and Ms. Sunday for their briefings. The Chairman is aware that the Transitional Government of National Unity submitted its October 2016 report. The previous report was in March. So far, JMEC has not raised any concerns to the Transitional Government of National Unity over the implementation of the chapters of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan. Aside from the lack of the resources needed to implement chapter II, relating to security arrangements, the delay in the implementation of article 14 of chapter I is largely attributable to the Chair of the National Constitutional Amendment Committee.

We are delighted to report that the Chair of the Committee reported to Juba two weeks ago, and all efforts are being made to review the legislation necessary for the reform, consistent with chapter IV of the peace agreement. We wish to advise that it includes the incorporation of the agreement into the constitution of the Republic of South Sudan.

The Transitional Government of National Unity has repeatedly declared its firm commitment to implementing the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan. In fact, it has already taken practical steps to that end in order to achieve lasting peace. It has established the Transitional Government of National Unity of the Republic of South Sudan, the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, the National Constitutional Amendment Committee and the Joint Military Ceasefire Commission, among other things. It has also implemented political inclusivity at the national level, as stipulated in the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan. In other words, various political forces are represented in the Government's composition, in line with the peace agreement.

In an effort to revitalize peacebuilding, the Transitional Government of National Unity came up with a plan for reconciliation and national dialogue using a bottom-up approach — starting within the communities and all the way up to the national level. The Government has also welcomed the Action Plan for Peace and Reconciliation, launched by the South Sudan Council of Churches, as a means of reinforcing Government peacebuilding efforts. The Transitional Government of National Unity welcomes all stakeholders to join that effort. However, it is important to note that the peace agreement in South Sudan was not based on individuals, but rather on various parties. Therefore, it should not be held hostage by individuals who have chosen to self-exile for reasons best known to themselves.

The implementation of the peace agreement can, and will, go on without those individuals. National dialogue is a process, and those who are not ready to join now may join whenever they feel ready to do so. National dialogue is not an alternative to the peace agreement in South Sudan. The Transitional Government of National Unity has actively engaged with the United Nations through its interactions with various delegations that have visited the country. That includes the delegation of the Security Council in early September 2016, with

which it signed a joint communiqué; the delegation of the United Nations strategic assessment team in early October 2016; the Head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan in early November 2016; the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Dieng; the High Commissioner for Human Rights and his assessment team; and the Panel of Experts on South Sudan established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2206 (2015).

The Transitional Government of National Unity has also cooperated closely with UNMISS through its technical team. The two parties have reached a common understanding on various issues of concern, in particular with regard to the deployment of a regional protection force, which the Government has accepted without preconditions. They agreed on other issues of concern as well, including, but not limited to, freedom of movement for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), unhindered access for relief personnel to deliver humanitarian assistance to all populations in need in South Sudan and the establishment of a one-stop-one-shop system to facilitate and expedite the issuance of visas, timely customs clearance, flight clearance and the elimination of bureaucratic obstacles, among other things.

As was indicated earlier, the Transitional Government of National Unity has accepted the deployment of the Regional Protection Force without any strings attached. It took further steps by allocating a plot of land to host the proposed force that covers an area of 2.514 square kilometres. Furthermore, it has approved requests for a second plot of land for the Regional Protection Force. UNMISS has already submitted the names of those who are to join officials in Jubek, along with state authorities, to inspect and survey that land.

During a visit to the country's capital on Tuesday, 21 March, Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said that the first units of the regional protection force for South Sudan would be deployed within a few weeks. Having cooperated with the United Nations, the region and the entire international community, the Transnational Government of National Unity had expected that its efforts would be positively acknowledged, rather than negatively reported.

The Transnational Government of National Unity strongly rejects as baseless any accusation of looming genocide or ethnic cleansing in South Sudan. South Sudan is a diverse country composed of approximately 60 tribes and ethnicities that have been living in peace and harmony since ancient times. The conflict in South Sudan is political, and characterized by a power struggle on the part of those who seek to take power by force: it has no ethnic dimension, despite what has been alleged by certain circles. Using the ethnic divide serves to muddy the waters and, perhaps, warrants the application of punitive measures against the Government.

We commend the Secretary-General for the recent statement he made at his press conference at the United Nations Gigiri complex, in which he said that the risk of genocide in South Sudan had significantly diminished. Although, in our view, the statement did not go far enough to debunk the allegation of looming genocide, it is nevertheless a welcome development and a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, the Transnational Government of National Unity categorically rejects any accusation that its forces target civilians, or use sexual violence as a tactic of war. The Government has only carried out its constitutional mandate to protect civilians from attacks by rebels and maintain law and order, which are among the primary constitutional functions of any Government in the world. It has also exercised its right to self-defence when attacked by negative forces and criminal elements, which is in line with international law, including Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Transnational Government of National Unity therefore appeals to the United Nations, the region and the entire international community to encourage and support the genuine efforts of the Government to implement the peace agreement, specifically the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, including the transitional security arrangements, so as to enable the achievement of lasting peace and stability in the country and end the immense suffering of the people. The Government is ready to do its part. The challenge is how to deal with the spoilers of peace and the political opportunists. We have recently witnessed the formation of new rebel groups that are bent on dislodging the Government by military means. Even the Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission recently remarked that those

new groups are composed of opportunists and criminals who have no coherent political agenda. Unless a clear message is sent to all rebel groups, they will continue to derail peace efforts.

The Transnational Government of National Unity thanks the United Nations and the donor community for their interventions in, and response to, the famine in the two counties of the former Unity state. The Government, however, takes issue with the accusation that it is responsible for the famine. It is also important to note that other parts of the country are affected by drought as a result of climate change. The Transnational Government of National Unity therefore takes this opportunity to state that it will spare no effort to address the situation and to call on the international community to assist in addressing that urgent matter.

The call for imposing targeted sanctions and an arms embargo would further aggravate the situation and hit vulnerable groups the hardest, as previous experience has shown.

I should like to conclude by reiterating my Government's stand on the implementation of the peace agreement in letter and spirit. The Transnational Government of National Unity accordingly appeals today to the United Nations, the region and the entire international community to encourage and support the genuine efforts of the Government in implementing the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, including the transitional security arrangements, so as to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country and eliminate the immense suffering of the people.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.